Digging Through to Manila

BY

LaSALLE CORBELL PICKETT

[Mrs. General George E. Pickett]

Author of "Pickett and His Men," etc., etc.

Illustrated by

M. MUEDEN

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LOVINGLY DEDICATED

TO

MY OWN LITTLE BOYS, WHOSE TINY HANDS WERE GUIDED BY LOVE IN THEIR EFFORT TO MAKE A PATHWAY WHEREON THEIR FEET MIGHT FOLLOW THEIR HEARTS TO THE FAR-AWAY ISLANDS OF THE SEA, AND TO ALL THE OTHER LITTLE ARMY BOYS WHO HAVE WATCHED WITH LONGING EYES FOR THE RETURN OF THEIR FATHERS ACROSS THE WATERS OF THE WEST.

Digging Through to Manila

Digging Through to Manila

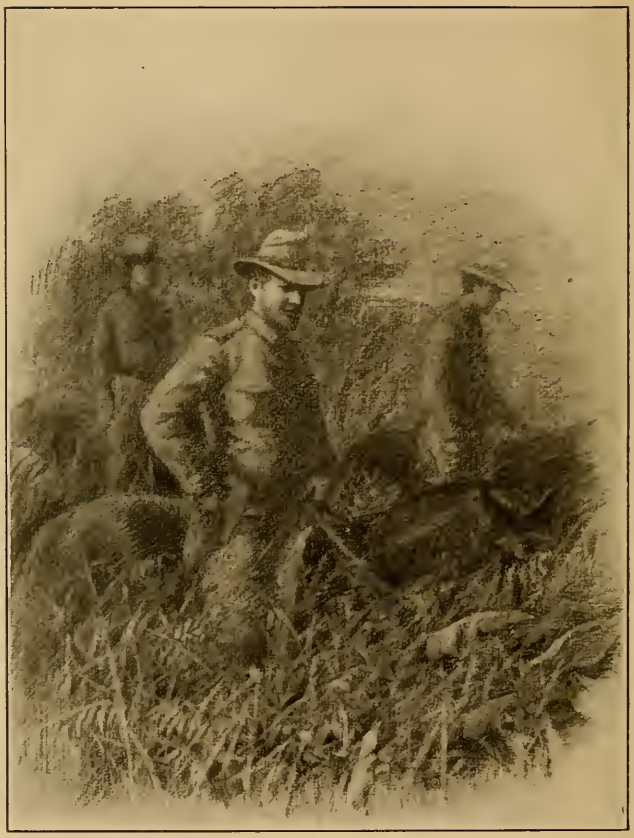
TWO little boys with shovel and with spade
Toiled eagerly beneath the maple's shade;
Between the leaves the bright sun glinted down;
It tinged with light the clustering curls of brown,
And warmed to vivid glow the golden hair
That crowned one head with wealth of beauty rare.
Bright eyes of blue, like summer skies above,
Bent downward in their earnest quest of love;—
Sweet eyes of brown, with laughing gleams of light,
Aglow with life's fair springtime, warm and bright:—
Blue eyes,—brown eyes,—I wonder what you see
As swift hands toil beneath the maple tree.

"Come in, my little ones!" the mother called,
"What do you?" as she saw them thus enthralled.
The little spade was emptied with due care,
And then the boy with shining golden hair
And azure eyes aglow with purpose high,
With voice like bird-notes sweet thus made reply:
"We're digging to Manila, Mother, dear;
They say that it is straight down under here;
And Papa's there and waiting for his boys;
He says we are his only, teasing, precious joys.
To far Manila we are digging through;
Won't he be glad to see his noisy crew?"

Dear little hands! At work the whole day long,
With hearts of love and faith so true and strong.—
The summer day sinks slowly to sweet rest,
The after-glow burns crimson in the west;
Night's veil falls o'er the dim horizon line,
And far above the first faint starlets shine;
And still the tireless hands work ever on
Until the sun's last rosy gleam is gone.
With folded hands and hearts aflame with zeal
Upon the sward the faithful workers kneel:
"Oh, God, we leave our Papa dear to you,
Till to far-off Manila we dig through."

Through coming years how many little hands
Will strive to reach the sun-scorched island sands;
And sweet brown orbs and eyes of azure hue
Will look in vain to see the waters blue
That dash against Manila's arid shore,
And break away in sad and solemn roar.
The sun through parted leafage sifting down
Will light gold hair and curls of softest brown
Bent over spades that dig the long day through,
While tender hearts, so loving and so true,
Will rise above in rev'rent, trustful prayer
That God will guard Papa "till we get there."

Far-off in tropic jungle black and dense,
With earnest face lit up by dark eyes tense
With ardent courage, hope and love and faith,
A man rides slowly through those shades of death.
His guards surround them, but he heeds them not,
His lonely heart is far from that dread spot;
Beyond the darkness of that gloomy place
He sees the light in each dear childish face;
The noisy trampling of the horses' feet
Is lost in faintest dream of music sweet;
Perchance he feels the echo of that prayer:—
"God keep our dear Papa till we get there."



As slowly rides he through the jungle dim,
His heart afar beyond the island's rim,
The horse's feet enmeshed in tangled grass,
That winds about them subtly as they pass,
Across the turgid air a bullet screams
And wakes the horseman from his sun-bright dreams;
Against his cheek he feels its burning breath,
His heart beats quickly at the sound of death,
The flash gleams lurid on the dusky day,
And still unscathed he rides along his way.
The Father up above has heard that prayer:—
"God keep our dear Papa till we get there!"

And ever linger mem'ries of that day
When to Manila the Sumner sailed away;
Loved ones on deck, close clasped in sad embrace,
In grimy dock eyes vainly seeking each dear face;
The jarring of the harsh, discordant bell
That rang the signal for the last farewell;
The whistle's scream, the rattling of the chain,
The shudder of the ship in mortal pain,
As if it knew the world of hopes and fears
It bore away 'mid rain of falling tears,
And felt the mighty pathos of that prayer:
"God keep our loved ones in His gentle care!"

From shores of Dawn to far Pacific sands
With tiny spades how many faithful hands
Are digging all the livelong summer day,
In hope to find dear Papa far away,
While on that slope where soldiers lie at rest
With still hands folded over quiet breast,
Beneath the dark and solemn willow shades
Are digging stronger hands with larger spades;
And slowly o'er the ocean's seething foam
The silent soldiers with still hearts come home.
In Heaven waits sweet answer to that prayer:—
"God keep our Papa dear till we get there."

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